

Narrator: Ruth Ruiz

Interviewer: Tina Dang

Date: May 20, 2021

Location: Zoom

Collection: Race and Oral History Course, Spring 2021

Length of Interview: 20:16

TD: Hi Ruth! My name is Tina Dang. Today is May 20, 2021 and I am interviewing Ruth Ruiz through Zoom for the UCSD Race and Oral History Project. For the purpose of this project, do you agree to grant the University permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

RR: Yes.

TD: Awesome. Can you please introduce yourself to me?

RR: My name is Ruth Ruiz. I am a first year student, well I just finished my first year at The University of Redlands. I'm majoring in Race and Ethnic Students and American Studies and I'm originally from San Diego.

TD: Awesome. Can you tell me which high school did you attend?

RR: I'm sorry? Grade school?

TD: High school

RR: Oh, high school sorry. I went to High Tech High International.

TD: Awesome. Can you describe a little bit about your hometown and your home environment?  
How did you grow up?

RR: Um so, I grew up between Barrio Logan in southeast San Diego. In southeast I lived in the Mountain Hope area really close to Costco on Market. So my environment has always been very good. Um my family has always tried to make sure that I grew up in a very healthy environment and in the neighborhoods where I grew up, there are predominantly people of color, and it's predominantly Mexican immigrants. So I grew up in areas where I saw myself reflected and I grew up with people that looked like me and were in similar situations as me. So, yeah.

TD: Growing up in an environment seeing cultures like yours, was it difficult when you transition to University of Redlands?

RR: Um, it wasn't difficult because um well it wasn't difficult but I did notice a difference like it wasn't like the difference in diversity was very obvious and um seeing more white students was very different. I wouldn't say it was difficult but it was very different, it was definitely something I had to adjust to.

TD: And what were your passions growing up or even passions you've developed, since you finished your first year of college?

RR: Yeah [smiles] So growing up, when I was little, my biggest passion was to like be a teacher, be an educator. I always wanted to play teacher with everyone. But as I grew older I kind of like realized I kind of want to do more research. And now that I am in college my passion is to go into teaching in education and I think a lot of it has to do with where I grew up especially in Barrio Logan there's a big emphasis in like educating the community and making sure we know our rights and making sure we know our history. So that has created a big impact on me and why I want to go into education and why I want to help others.

TD: I know you're an alumni at Barrio Logan College Institute, how did you become part of this organization?

RR: I started attending BLCI in grade school, I was in third grade. My principal had actually recommended me to the program. So then the program reached out and thought I'd be a good candidate for the program and thought that I would be a good fit and I filled out that application and I've been part of BLCI ever since.

TD: Can you explain or go more in depth about your experience at BLCI like what did you experience and what was helpful to you as a student?

RR: At BLCI, my experience has always been very positive. I think I went through a lot of changes with BLCI as BLCI was changing as well. We all kind of like, I feel like I grew with BLCI and I want to say I've always had good experiences. In middle school I was lagging a lot in my classes and I was able to bring my grade up really quickly from one year to another and I started to do really good again. BLCI helped me get there because they offered me tutoring and because I was kind of struggling a lot more than other students. I had scheduled tutoring with the tutors that kind of knew my situation and he kind of like walked me through it and he knew what I had to worked on. So there was something I really enjoyed was kind of that one on one with tutors and with coordinators. At the end I was rewarded with a gift card which was nice and made me feel like I was doing good and I was on the right path. So yeah, that has been my experiences and BLCI also offers a lot of time for us to do our work and throughout my high school program, our coordinator really focused on making sure that we were appreciating our past and that were learning our history and that we acknowledged that we're also paving a path for the generations that are coming after us, because most of us are first gen, so yeah that has that has been a bit of my experience.

TD: In your opinion, do you think that BLCI met your expectations?

RR: Um, yeah. I think BLCI did meet my expectations. I will say that because I've been in BLCI for so long and I kind of went through a lot of the changes that they were going through, there were a lot of like little patches that I kind of went through just because you know BLCI was growing and they're opening new spaces and they were hiring new people so there were a little bit of like rough patches here and there but they're understandable because we were going

through changes and BLCI was growing so I think it did meet my expectations. It did what it always told us it was going to do, that they were going to do their best to get us to college and work with us. So yeah.

TD: I know that you mentioned that you are a first generation student, what is it like to be a first gen student?

RR: I think that there's a lot of pressure in first generation students especially for a lot of first gen students who come from immigrant homes. Because there's that expectation that you're gonna go to college and you're going to make a lot of money and you're gonna get your family out of poverty. So it is, well for me, it's always that's always been kind of like a big expectation and kind of like the big dream for us. But it's been it's been hard, but at the same time, I love it because I feel like I'm, I get to not, like experience all these new things as a student and I get to experience them like as being the first person to ever experience in my family and I think that's there's something really unique about that and also the fact that I get that if I ever have kids or nephews or whatever like I get to help then and I get to help future generations like go to college and they get to learn from my experiences as well, and that way they don't have to go through as many hard times that I've been going through. But I, that's kind of like how it's been for me.

TD: I just want to dig a little bit. You mentioned, you know the pressure, the hard times, can you talk about just one experience of when was it so hard for you like a memorable experience that you would like to talk about?

RR: I want to say that this past semester I was like on campus so I want to say that, that was the most memorable experience where it was a little hard. Just because I went to college alone, like I don't really have any friends, I still don't have any friends, but I'm just kind of like being alone and just like away from family and kind of just learning how to get through campus on my own was really hard. This might sound like a little dumb or whatever but like going into the cafeteria or the dining hall for the first time was very overwhelming. Just like not knowing where to go and just like trying to figure out what to get, for me personally, that was really overwhelming and it did make me like very like anxious I was like I don't know what I'm doing here. But yeah just being on campus in general was really hard because it seems like everyone knew what they were doing and everyone knew where they were going. So yeah that was really hard for me.

TD: Yeah, you know, as a college student myself I'm pretty sure that people on a face like I know what I'm doing but really deep down no one knows what they're doing.

RR: [laughs] yeah

TD: I think that, the fact that you're trying to navigate as a first gen, you know all alone, I think you're doing very well. So, good for you. Um, if you, after experiencing the first year of college, what advice would you give to future first gen specifically BLCI students?

RR: I would advise them to ask for help and ask questions. I know that as first gen students a lot of time we feel like every question we ask is not just because we're doing everything for the first time but like even if it sounds dumb or like you don't get it like ask. Like just always make sure

ask and ask because I know there's, well at least when I was on campus there was definitely like sort of like like they're not asking I don't know if I should ask I just felt kind of dumb asking like these little questions but at the end of the day like if I wouldn't have asked then I probably wouldn't have solved my issues or my problems. So yeah, that would be my advice.

TD: Thank you. I know that you started your first year of college during the COVID-19 pandemic, how has it impacted your life?

RR: It impacted my life in the way that like I feel like it changed the way I was kind of looking at school and at college. It's definitely, school and college is definitely still something I take very seriously and it's a big part in my life. But I guess it kind of taught me to like give myself time and just really, like, even though I was still doing things good and everything like it was, it kind of just taught me to like calm down a little bit and to not be grade obsessive and to not try to compete with everyone I guess. It kind of, I don't know [shrugs], that's that's the way I kind of looked at it, it's kind of like, it's changed my life in the way where I like, I feel like where I'm more patient with myself and more understanding with myself.

TD: How has your family or community been affected by COVID?

RR: We were affected early on when COVID started. My dad was getting put off work a lot and my dad works at Nassco, the shipyards in Barrio Logan at the little bay. We were having a lot of issues with that just because the company wasn't letting any of the employees know that who had COVID and if they were in close contact with them and there was a situation where my

dad's supervisor had COVID and still showed up to work and my dad had close contact with him because it's his supervisor. We were lucky enough that my dad didn't get COVID but it was a very frustrating situation where we didn't know if my dad was, could be safe at work. That's a way in which we were affected. And then, my mom is also a lunch lady so she got completely put off work for the first few months and she wasn't working at all. That's another place where my family was kind of struggling. We were able to get it all together though. Figured it out [smiles].

TD: Good. I'm so sorry. That must've been very frustrating and stressful. Um, I just want to go back a little bit. As a first gen student, you mentioned that you lived on campus so a little bit far away from home. What was the interactions between your family and you the fact that you are no longer home?

RR: So it was definitely hard because I'm very like I'm very attached to my family. It's always been like me and my parents. When COVID started, I got really attached to my mom. We were kind of going everywhere together and we were both like we were attached by the hip. So it was really hard going on campus after spending so much time with my family and getting so close. But while I was on campus, it was constant phone calls with my mom. When I just got there we were calling each other everyday. Eventually it became like a weekly thing or like a once in a while type of thing. But I'm also close enough to home where they can come and visit and our close contacts was like three people and they were the only people I was seeing because I didn't really have any friends on campus. So they'd come visit me and they'd bring me some food from home because cafeteria food is not it sometimes [chuckles]. So they'd bring me some food

sometimes and they'd visit and they spent the day. So yeah, it's kind of like our interactions how they were happening while I was at school.

TD: Aw, I'm glad that you know, you have a close relationship with your mom and the fact you guys were able to you know navigate with you being on campus, very supportive. I'm glad. I just want to go a little bit in depth of, you know, what are you looking forward to your second year at University of Redlands?

RR: I'm looking forward to kind of like focusing on more like my major and what I really want to study. I feel like the first year is very heavy on like GEs on like the general classes and this next semester or this next year Imma have the opportunity to take more classes that have to do with my major, that's something I'm really excited and really looking forward to and kind of like just exploring a little bit more with what I can do with my major. So, yeah.

TD: Can you just clarify what is your major?

RR: So my major is, I'm double majoring in Race and Ethnic Studies and Latin American Studies. So yeah that's that's what I'm in.

TD: And how did you come to find that you wanted to double major in both of those topics?

RR: So, I was only I first thought it was only going to do Race and Ethnic Studies. Initially I was thinking about minoring but then I was like now I'm just gonna make it my major like this is

what I'm passionate about and I was talking to a friend in a club and he was mentioning that he was double minoring in Latin American Studies and something else, I forgot what it was, but he said that a lot of the classes, kind of like collided with each other and I had already been thinking about going into Latin American Studies and I noticed that Ethnic Studies and Latin American Studies kind of like overlapped a lot. So that's why I decided to double major.

TD: Ever since, you know, you went off to college have you, you know reached back to BLCI or any communication with any of the staff members?

RR: Yeah so, I'm in most communication with Karla and it's a lot of like emailing more than anything so when Karla has, one there's an event for alumni, she like reaches out and she's like would you guys like to participate and they still hold workshops for alumni so that's a great way we've all been kind of like still involved and skill kind of participating. The last one I attended was one about credit union, with credit union, and that was about like how to build your credit and how to make it grow. So they definitely help us a lot with like the growing up part, the adulting part, with the workshops. So that's how I've been in contact.

TD: If you could pinpoint your best experience at BLCI, what would it be?

RR: I want to say my best experiences definitely were like junior year and senior year. But I want to say that the one I kind of like enjoyed the most was like the summer before my senior year of high school. We did like a partnership type of thing with detainee allies, and they write letters and send news to the people that are detained in Otay Mesa. Most of them are like

immigrants, seeking asylum. So that was an experience that was like very unforgettable because we were reading a lot of letters that they were sending to us and the experiences that they have are incredible and being able to like talk to them, and write letters back to them was very, to me, was very important and was something that was very impactful in my life and the way I was seeing the immigrant situation here. So, I think that's been my best experience with BLCI was being able to do like community work with them. And I think just community service and community work with BLCI in general like it's always been a very good experience.

TD: I know that you mentioned a lot of like community work and how much you love it and how valuable it is, do you see yourself engaging in more community work events or organizations?

RR: Yeah for sure. I definitely see myself like a student fresh out of college working with nonprofit or like coming back to BLCI or even just working with the community wherever it is, like I definitely see myself in community work, that's definitely another one of my passions is just giving back to the community. Because with our community like it's really hard for us to like go places so giving back is very important to me and it's something I for sure want to do as soon as I'm done with school.

TD: Awesome. So that's all the questions that I have for our interview today. Is there anything else you would like to say before I end our interview?

RR: Um, no, I think I'm good

TD: Thank you so much for your time and I will conclude our interview.

RR: Thank you.